FEBRUARY 1992

Equity Matters

University of Toronto

Status of Women Office / Office of the President

CHILD CARE

This is the first "one-issue issue" of the Status of Women Office newsletter. However, given an issue as complex and critical as child care, and a setting as potentially flexible and yet relentlessly traditional as a university, it has been a challenge to bring the essential background together with a personal perspective in a few pages. This task has been effectively carried out by Rita Kindl, a Qualifying Year student in comparative literature employed under the Ontario Work-Study Plan. We look forward to seeing child care move up on the agenda in the months ahead.

Lois Reimer

N'Sheemaehn Child Care Centre

Child Care in Canada

The efforts of the federal and provincial governments to provide services for the child care needs of Canadian families appear haphazard. Policies have come into effect or been renewed only as they became necessary. An effective and widespread system, such as for instance, the health or education systems, does not exist. Instead legislation has established provisions for parental leaves, standards for government monitored and partially government-supported child care services, as well as grants and subsidies available to both child care centres and families.

In terms of leaves, the Federal Unemployment Insurance Act guarantees a 15 week maternity leave, after which either parent can take a further 10 weeks. Adoptive parents are guaranteed a 10 week leave period. However, the provincial governments establish the criteria for eligibility. (For example, as of 1991 only Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia allow parental leaves.) Whether employers wish to add to the leave benefits, by adding to the salary benefits or by providing some leave days for family responsibilities, is left to the employer's discretion.

Providing benefits for leaves is only one option. Many parents cannot afford to leave their job to care for their children at home. Child care options vary from relying on a relative, friend, or neighbour, to hiring a nanny, or a baby-sitter; to paying for a space at a licensed or unlicensed non-profit or for-profit child care centre.

The financial support for child care which is shared by federal, provincial and municipal governments, ranges from a federal tax deduction on the parent's income tax return, to providing subsidies to families applying for spaces at non-profit centres, to grants directly available to the centres themselves, provided they are licensed and non-profit.

Although support is available, on a practical level it is not systematically organized, nor does it meet the ever-increasing need for child care in Canada. In fact, in 1990 a little over 60% of Canadian mothers with children younger than 6 years of age, worked outside the home. In 1990 estimates disclosed that in Canada, there were close to 3 million children under the age of 12 whose parents worked. In the same year, there were approximately 300,000 spaces available in licensed, non-profit child care centres, only a portion of which are subsidized. A family in need of child care and also in need of a subsidy will be placed on two separate waiting lists: one for a space at a licensed child care centre, the second for a subsidy. The waiting list for the subsidy is regulated by the municipality, the other by the individual child care centre. There is no guarantee that the lists will coincide. Families often have to refuse the space that has finally come available, because they have not yet received or were refused the subsidy.

Government support has simply guaranteed that a minimal level of regulated, monitored, licensed, subsi-

dized care exists. There is little incentive to increase or vary the services, so that the differing care needs of children (e.g. physical, developmental, linguistic) are met. Nor are the differing needs of families being met; child care services are needed in both rural and urban parts of Canada. Not everyone works from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m., so that variety in the scheduling of services should be provided. Child care services need to be developed to meet varying needs, but like most necessary social services in Canada, their continued existence and development are not assured.

Child Care at the University of Toronto

The child care situation at the University of Toronto reflects that of the rest of Canada. Efforts are made to offer child care services, and other options, such as taking leaves are available; however, the question remains as to whether these provisions actually meet the existing demand. Do the programs that exist reflect the social changes of our communities?

At the University of Toronto, the community has substantially changed. No longer is the student body, for instance, populated predominantly by young single men. Today, roughly 55% of the student population, 65% of the administrative staff, and 20% of the teaching staff are female. This is not the only difference, the age of University students has risen. As the University community has undergone a change, so have the needs of its members.

Child care became an issue at the University of Toronto in the late 1960s. Until 1969 there were no child care centres on campus. In response to this problem, a group of parents occupied a Sussex Street building and used it as a Day Care centre. Thus the *Campus Co-operative Community Day Care Centre* began as a result of the frustration felt by many parents.

Pressure from the community eventually succeeded in gaining a response from the University administration. In 1972 a policy was established for Day Care and in 1974 a second day care centre opened on Devonshire Place, the *Margaret Fletcher Day Care Centre*. The 1972 policy set fairly broad parameters for the relationship between the University and the Day Care centres. The University administration saw itself as responsible for the maintenance and development of child care services on campus, but the policy maintained that the centres operate as separate incorporated organizations, at arm's-length from the University.

When the 1972 policy was reviewed in 1987, the relationship between the University administration and the individual child care centres was further defined. For example, the financial support from the administration is listed. This support alleviates certain basic expenses, such as rent, building maintenance, the cost of utilities and of the renovations necessary to maintain a child care license. Other policies of the University also recognize child care needs. The 1989 policy for student housing stated that child care facilities should now be included in family housing. In an effort to add to the variety of services, the *N'Sheemaehn Child Care Centre* at Scarborough campus opened in 1990, and last fall the *Erindale College Child Care Resource Centre* was launched as a pilot project.

The University of Toronto has responded to the child care needs on campus, but only after a lot of pressure from the community. The response simply guarantees that child care services exist at a minimal level. There remain many obstacles to providing complete services. For example, operating costs remain high, which makes child care centre fees (even when these are considered reasonable) beyond the reach of many. What becomes a problem is providing the services to the faculty, staff and students who cannot afford them. Kathleen McElroy, the supervisor of the *N'Sheemaehn Child Care Centre*, expressed concern for the fact that many staff members cannot afford the fees, yet their salaries are above the maximum limit for subsidy eligibility. She also mentioned that many students are not taking advantage of the subsidies available to them. Of the 46 spaces at the centre, a number of which are subsidized, only 10 are used by the children of student-parents.

The supervisor of the *Margaret Fletcher Day Care Centre*, Mamie Armaly, expressed concern for the lack of truly innovative development by the University. Parents need part-time services, a drop-in service, perhaps a resource centre. All this, she said, calls for a desire and

CHILD CARE AT SCARBOROUGH CAMPUS

N'SHEEMAEHN CHILD CARE CENTRE

- Telephone: 287-7624
- open from 7:30 a.m. until 6 p.m.
- 46 spaces available for children, between infancy and 5 years of age
- FEES (as of Jan. 1992): $970/month for infants, $823/month for toddlers and $696/month for preschoolers

Margaret Fletcher DayCare Centre

readiness to act on the part of the University.

However, child care centres are not the only solution. Since child care is expensive and there are not as many spaces available as there are children in need of care, many parents choose to take leaves, or perhaps work part-time. As an employer, the University offers maternity leaves, adoption leaves, and personal leave days. Paid maternity leave is available for up to 17 weeks, in most cases the University adds to the benefit received from Unemployment Insurance. An adoption leave identical to the maternity leave is available to either parent. Employees can also take an unpaid parental leave. An employee of the University of Toronto wishing to extend his/her time off can request either an extended leave, a reduced workload, or consideration of some form of job-sharing. His/her employer is committed to trying to meet these demands.

Female graduate students can request a maternity leave of up to 3 academic terms. The deadline for the completion of their degree will simply be extended for the duration of their leave. Both maternity and paternity leaves are available to teaching assistants. Female teaching assistants can take up to 17 weeks off; however after 2 months, they will no longer be paid. Fathers are granted a 2 day paid leave of absence, which must be taken within the first month of their child's birth.

As in the wider community, child care facilities and leaves are available to faculty, staff and students at the University of Toronto, but they certainly do not meet the demand. Child care still is considered a personal responsibility; relegated as a domestic, female task. However the reality is that more women study, and take on professions afterwards, and more fathers are becoming involved in the daily care giving needs of their children. Also true is the fact that more single-parent families are headed by women. The way society's members care for their children has altered. Therefore, the way a community views child care and organizes for child care will have to change. As a community, the University is in a position in society to offer an innovative example.

A Conversation with Kate Gregory

Last fall Kate Gregory, Lois Reimer and Rita Kindl met over coffee, to talk about Kate's experiences as a mother and a doctorate student with the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering. Talking to Kate revealed how parenting needs and responsibilities and academic research can be worked around each other, with a lot of flexibility and organization. Kate nonetheless has encountered difficulties, and stereotypical expectations of the viability of being a mother and a student.

As a doctorate student in the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering, Kate Gregory is not the first female graduate student in her department to bear a child. By this spring, however, she expects to be the first to complete her thesis. Also this spring, Kate's family will celebrate her daughter Beth's third birthday.

Beth

The experience of Kate demonstrates that there are still many stereotypes that stigmatize pregnancy and motherhood. First of all people automatically assume that the pregnancy is an accident. But for Kate and her husband, this child was planned for and happily anticipated. There exist a number of falsehoods surrounding the viability of academic work and motherhood. (Fatherhood has not conventionally been an issue.) Supposedly a student, away from her Department on maternity leave is at a disadvantage; when she returns she will be left far behind "the cutting edge" of her field. But as Kate Gregory pointed out, this opinion would be unacceptable in the case of a student having to recover from an illness or an accident; any organized parent and academic will not necessarily fall behind.

There are daily practical considerations that almost deny access to University buildings, in particular the older buildings at the University of Toronto. How does someone get a stroller into the Wallburg Building? For the consideration of students, children are not allowed in the stacks of Robarts Library and for the safety of the mother and child some laboratories are closed to them. But this in no way should completely restrict access. If information on what specifically is dangerous to children and parents in a laboratory were more readily available, parents could take the necessary precautions. If a drop-in child care centre were operating on the St. George campus, the library would be more accessible.

We could emphasize the difficulties, but Kate Gregory's experiences make obvious that given a great deal of organization and flexibility a woman can be both a student and a mother. Kate offers good advice. For instance, as a married woman and a graduate student, Kate stressed the importance of choosing an open-minded graduate supervisor. She knew that some supervisors could destroy a woman's chance of studying while bearing children. Fortunately Kate Gregory's supervisor has been both flexible and supportive.

Another important consideration involved preparing for her leave after the birth of her child. A 4 month leave was arranged with the School of Graduate Studies. This simply extended the deadline for her PhD thesis by the 4 months. Next she planned a leave with her source of funding, which was interrupted during the 4 months and continued afterwards.

As a family in need of child care services, Kate, her partner and their daughter used a total of 5 different child care options by the time that Beth was 2 years old. For the first 4 months after the birth, Kate took time off and stayed at home with the infant. When Beth was 4 months until she was 14 months old, Beth's parents shared their responsibilities between themselves, Beth's grandmother took care of her and Kate paid a mother's helper to come to her house for 2 days a week. At 14 months Beth entered a for-profit child care centre and at 18 months,

Beth changed to a non-profit centre. Both of these centres were off-campus. The variety of solutions reflects the situation for most parents, which is as much a result of the reality of parenthood, which demands flexibility, as of the fact that child care options are few in Canada.

As much as Kate Gregory's experiences prove that a mother can be an effective academic and that an academic can also enjoy motherhood, she expressed concerns. First of all, she feels that the campus needs a drop-in centre which would provide child care services, run as a resource centre and as a meeting place for parents. Such a centre could provide information on the availability of child care in Toronto, of subsidies, as well as information on hazards on campus to a child's and mother's health. With a meeting place, parents would feel less isolated on campus. They could discuss problems, exchange advice, offer hints, help, and friendship. Kate also expressed concern for the lack of knowledge about parenthood at the University. How many parents are there within the University community? How many among them are students, staff members or faculty? How many are men and how many are women? We take it for granted that the University community consists of young single men and women. We may very easily be surprised by the results.

We are still only beginning to recognize the changes in the University community. As far as governments and administrations are concerned, they hesitantly acknowledge changes on a practical level. As a community, we still expect women to be largely responsible for the daily care of children. Realistically, it is asking a lot of a woman to be a mother and raise children, while working and participating in financially supporting a family. Our communities, governments and administrations should become conscious of the social values they are acknowledging and legitimizing in the practical changes they make to child care and leave-taking policies.

Rita Kindl

CHILD CARE AT ERINDALE CAMPUS

ERINDALE COLLEGE CHILD CARE RESOURCE CENTRE

- Telephone: 828-3846
- open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.
- provides care for 5 children at any one time and for 3 infants at any one time
- FEES (as of Jan. 1992): $4.50/hour for children under 18 months and $3.50/hour for children over 18 months old
- A non-licensed part-time and drop-in child care service
- provides a resource and referral service for both formal and informal child care, and a support network for parents

CHILD CARE CENTRES AT ST. GEORGE CAMPUS

CAMPUS CO-OPERATIVE COMMUNITY DAY CARE CENTRE

- Telephone: 979-2133
- open from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m.
- full-time care for 10 infants, 15 toddlers, 25 preschoolers
- FEES (as of Jan. 1992): for infants: $950/month, for toddlers: $776/month and for preschoolers: $666/month

THE MARGARET FLETCHER DAY CARE CENTRE

- Telephone: 978-6725
- Open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- full-time care for 56 preschool children, between the ages of 2 1/2 and 5 years of age
- Full monthly fee is $570.00 (as of Jan. 1992)

KIDSPACE DAY CARE at ONTARIO INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

- Telephone: 926-4702
- open from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m.
- spaces for 24 children, between the ages of 2 1/2 and 6 years, 10 of which are part-time
- FEES (as of Jan. 1992): $27.82 per day or $18.10 per half day with lunch or $16.70 per half day without lunch
- gives first priority to children whose parents work or study at OISE

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